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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews various studies of media development patterns, all pointing to mass media growth's association with urbanization. The development and use of mass media differs greatly among urban, suburban, and rural areas. However, media development patterns are similar among countries, differing in the stage but not the pattern of media development. As modernization occurs, the media spread from larger urban centers to smaller towns and eventually into rural areas. When media development and availability are equal in urban, rural, and suburban areas, media use is similar. Greater media availability means greater media use, in time and in numbers of media, no matter what the geographic area. The choice and use of media definitely relate to one's place of residence and interest in community. Media choices are also influenced by social context and daily living and work patterns. Although personal and demographic factors such as income, education, and literacy are associated with mass media use, these variables have little predictive power in explaining urban, suburban, and rural communication pattern differences. In fact, mass media availability and relevant content can supersede the barriers of illiteracy in rural areas of developing nations. Research needs are suggested. (Author/TO)

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MASS COMMUNICATION DIFFERENCES BETWEEN URBAN, SUBURBAN AND RURAL AREAS: CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISONS

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MASS COMMUNICATION DIFFERENCES BETWEEN URBAN, SURBURBAN AND RURAL AREAS: CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISONS

Lloyd R. Bostian

The history of mass media development shows striking geographic patterns, and the development and use of mass media differs greatly among urban, suburban and rural people. Although we might expect the pattern of media development to differ on a national level, say for example between a developing African nation and an earlier developed European country, basically the media development pattern is similar no matter what the cultural heritage involved.

Generally it is the stage of media development which varies, not the pattern of that development. The way we talk about areas often reflects their stage of modernization. Rural is associated with tradition; urban with modernization. Suburban is either ultra-modern or transitional, depending on the country's stage of development.

The major differences lie in media development and use within countries. Subcultural differences in urban, suburban and rural areas result in differing communication patterns. The reason for this within-country variance is that communication patterns are primarily the product of communication channels available. Communication channels or media are basically the product of a modernizing society, an extension of man's search for efficiency in getting messages to larger

and larger audiences. This is not to argue that mass media have no contribution to make as a cause of modernization, but simply that the existence of mass media is due to a certain level of development. Since mass media are a product of this type of change which we call modernization, then it is logical that media are most associated with those sectors of the society which are most modern--primarily the urban sectors.

We can look at our own country as an example. In the infancy of the United States, when population was primarily rural, media developed largely in the urban areas of the country. The first newspapers, even the first farm magazines, were usually produced in the largest metropolitan communities. A review of mass media growth in other countries also indicates that a certain population density seems to be required for media development, especially for non-nationalized commercial media. Media are usually located in urban centers and their audiences are located in or near those centers. Exceptions lie in those countries where transportation and distribution systems are extremely well developed and geographically spread.

As a country modernizes, media spread from larger urban centers to smaller towns and into rural areas. This spread is not uniform if development is not uniform among rural areas. We can see the effect of varying degrees of modernization on the growth of media within a country by taking Brazil as an example. In southern Brazil, where development is proceeding

rapidly, dozens of radio stations and weekly newspapers are located in small towns of rural areas. There is sufficient commerce and service center development to support the media. But in northeast Brazil, an area of continued relative poverty, media development in rural areas has proceeded at a much slower rate.

Since the media growth pattern is basically from urban to rural, then the resulting use of the media system -- the flow of information -- is primarily from urban to rural. Values reflected in media content are basically those of the urban portion of society. The rural subculture's values remain relatively unexpressed, accentuating the perception of urban values as modern ones, and as the implied appropriate ones. Thus not only are media a product of urbanization, but their resulting use is primarily to extend the modernizing values into the traditional subculture.

Suburbia provides variance in this pattern. Suburban development, and suburban media development, in highly developed countries such as the United States is a product of people's desire to combine urban services with rural living. But in many other areas of the world, primarily poor countries experiencing rapid movement of rural population to large cities, suburban growth is often due to lack of housing in the urban centers. The first type of suburbia is thus a product of affluence; the latter derives from poverty. Obviously media development and use and communication habits differ in these two types of suburbia.

Mass Media and Urbanization

Research has produced a plethora of data to back generalizations concerning the relation of mass media to modernization and urbanization. In fact one author sees mass communication as a part of all social science approaches to explaining modernization. Mishra (1) has traced the mass communication perspective as permeating social, anthropological, psychological, political, historical, economic and developmental approaches to urbanization-modernization. Urbanization and modernization are seen as concomitant, mutual and reciprocal, with mass media an integral aspect.

What evidence is there to link urbanization, modernization and mass media? Perhaps the most encompassing attempt to pinpoint factors associated with the development of mass communications in national social systems is the study of Farace and Donohew (2). They utilized data from 115 countries to examine the relationship of 43 variables to mass media.

Of the 43 factors, the variable most representative of urbanization was the percent of urban population. The authors found a high correlation (.68) between percent urban population and newspaper circulation, and almost as high (.63) between urbanization and the number of radio receivers per 100 people. These urbanization-mass media linkages were among the highest correlations found. From the point of view of social science methodology, we should place considerable value on this regression analysis which examined data from so many countries with different experiences in modernization.

On the other hand, these data are an amalgamation from many different systems. Combining the data might mask differences within countries. One might expect, for example, to find a different pattern of mass media growth, one less associated with urbanization, in countries with nationalized media systems, especially socialist or communist nations, than in countries with non-governmental commercial media. Such a possibility occurred to Fagen (3) in his examination of media growth in communist and non-communist countries. His basic assumption was that in media control, content and use, there are well documented and important differences between East and West, and we can thus expect to find differences in rates and patterns of growth. He found that media growth has been more rapid in communist countries than one would predict from independent variables such as literacy and real gross national product (GNP), and less rapid in non-communist countries than one would predict. Yet the association between media development and urbanization was clear in both groups of countries.

Data from single-country studies also reinforce these multi-country findings that mass media are urban phenomena. Mytton (4) traced mass media development in several East African countries -- in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. In Uganda, missionary education succeeded in producing a concentrated literate population around Kampala which supported newspaper growth. But in Tanzania, with less European influence, less literacy and scattered population, the press developed slowly.

Currently, Dar es Salaam has a relatively high readership of daily newspapers, but readership falls away rapidly in rural areas not far from the city, even in villages served by good roads. Mytton observes that "the daily press is a phenomenon of urban life". Further, radio set ownership and listenership is higher in urban areas than in rural Tanzania. Yet radio is the only medium reaching even in a limited way into the rural areas where 95% of the population live. Mytton states that unless per capita income or production of low-priced radio receivers increase, the majority of Tanzanians will continue to be unreached by mass media, including radio.

Is the situation similar in West Africa? Hachten (5) has examined mass media development in several nations -- the Ivory Coast shows a typical development. Only 10% of the population is urbanized, yet mass media are almost totally concentrated in the capital, Abidjan. Media reach mostly the urban elites, and since elites speak French, media operate in that language. The 60 tribes speaking many other languages and dialects are not a part of the media system. Thus both geography and language are barriers to rural use of mass media. Hachten agrees with Mytton by saying that the greatest communication need in the Ivory Coast, as in most African nations, is to extend the mass media from the capital out to the rural areas.

In countries with a longer history of mass media development than most African nations, media have extended farther into rural areas. For example, Turkey's media development shows a well-developed

provincial press. Yet Frey (6) notes that 3/5 of all 1,658 newspapers and periodicals produced as of 1960 were published in the three largest cities. And despite broadcasting linkage to most areas of the country, some 43% of the radio receivers were located in the provinces of the three largest cities. Even in rural areas, Frey found that the larger the village, the more access individuals had to radio and newspapers.

From the other side of the world, Mitchell (7) reports substantial media development in Thailand's up-country provinces, especially of nondaily newspapers and radio stations. Of 51 nondailies, 36 are in up-country provinces (the remaining 15 in the Bangkok area). Of 64 radio stations, 33 are up-country (31 are in Bangkok area). However Mitchell predicts that further development of the Thai transportation system will increase competition between Bangkok dailies and the nondaily up-country papers, leading to a decline in these provincial media. Thus Thailand may be reaching the stage in which the number of newspapers decline while circulation of remaining papers increases. (The U.S. reached this stage around 1910 and southern Brazil has passed this stage.)

Many additional single-country mass media studies could be cited but almost all point to mass media growth as associated with urbanization.

Media Availability and Media Use

Explaining communication differences by documenting greater or lesser availability of mass media in a geographic area is

helpful, but too simplistic -- it ignores the media user. If we think of media development in terms of the communications process, then the next question is whether greater media availability is associated with greater use of media by individuals. As we shall show, the answer is yes, though qualified.

In one of the few studies to provide comparative data for urban, suburban and rural residents of a given geographic area, MacLean (8) examined use of radio, newspapers, magazines, books and movies in Minnesota. He measured both the personal use of media in terms of reported regular reading and listening and viewing, and in terms of time spent with media. He interviewed city (500,000 plus inhabitants), small city (11,000), village (1,500) and rural inhabitants and found that the use of mass media declined from city toward farm. City people were highest in all five media use categories.

However, MacLean found a relatively high degree of media use in all homes, no matter what the degree of urbanity involved. More than 95% of residents sampled in the four areas regularly read a newspaper and listened to radio. Magazine readership varied from 72 to 87%. Although farmers had less book-reading and movie-going than others sampled, they had greater magazine readership than small city or village residents.

Thus the MacLean study reinforces the mass media - urbanization link and the hypothesis that the greater availability means greater use. But this does not mean that availability is the only determinant of the level of use. In media use we see other facts in action besides availability. Farmers had higher

use of magazines than one would predict from the urban-rural continuum. This is because the magazines read are mostly farm magazines which carry vital information used in the business of farming. Thus the function of this print medium is decidedly different than for the urban reader.

Bostian and Ross (9) found that rural Wisconsin families, with slightly less media availability than the average U.S. resident, had media use measured in time spent equal to that of a national sampling. Time spent with television, radio, newspapers and magazines was approximately equal for farm families as for the nationwide sample. However the specific content and program preferences were somewhat different. Radio farm programs and farm magazines were important sources of technical information for the rural residents.

These two U.S. studies show clearly that when mass media availability does not differ substantially between urban and rural areas, other factors must be looked to for an explanation of media behavior.

Place of Residence

Beyond degree of urbanization and mass media availability, what is there about place of residence that influences the communication habits of individuals? Is the context of "community" helpful in explaining mass media communication habits? By community we mean the relationship of an individual to his immediate surroundings, including cultural and social contexts.

Does one's choice of media and resulting use relate to one's

place of residence and interest in community? Carter and Clarke (10) examined this by measuring place of residence as related to an individual's best source of "integrative" news. They defined integrative news as that which "emphasizes community values and conveys information about social organizations in which people cooperate in order to achieve objectives". The authors predicted that both city and suburban residents would likely use media they viewed as best sources of integrative news. Data confirmed this. Of city men, 82% had high interest in daily papers as a source of integrative news and 18% had high interest in weeklies. Of suburban men, 38% chose dailies for integrative news and 62% selected weeklies. This correlation between place of residence and best source of news that relates to one's sense of community led the authors to speculate that situational influences of suburban living lead to greater involvement with local concerns and greater interest in local media.

MacLean and Pinna (11) have also examined preferences of people for "local" news, finding a high correlation (rank order of .88) between distance from the reader's place of residence to the source of news and the reader's perceived interest in that news. In other words, physical distance from a source of news is correlated with psychological (as measured by news interest) distance from that news.

MacLean and Pinna go on to point out that interest and distance need to be fitted into other factors bearing on people's

images of places -- including the amount of commerce (in its broadest sense) people have with places. They conclude that psychological distance is bound to influence strongly our choice of mass media and more especially our selection of content within these media. These findings reinforce the journalistic principle that the audience is most interested in items that are physically and psychologically close to them.

But what happens to people who live between alternative sources of news -- those individuals in interurban zones? On what basis do they choose media, for example select a newspaper from several published nearby? Bogart and Orenstein (12) hypothesized that individuals living in an interurban zone would have definite patterns of attraction to nearby cities and would choose mass media reflecting this attraction. Their results confirmed this hypothesis. People shopping and visting in a particular nearby urban center also were much more likely to subscribe to the newspaper of that location than of another location. In other words, the media choice was related to the socio-physical utility of the urban center.

Nearness of suburbanites to an urban center appears to be influential in media use even in developing countries. Various studies have shown that migrants from rural areas living in suburban fringes of large cities quickly adopt media habits similar to those of the urban center and develop media use of more affluent city dwellers. Mishra (13) found this the case in his study of four basties, communities of slum dwellers, in

greater Delhi. Suburban slum dwellers had greater radio and newspaper use than would have been predicted from general population media use averages.

In rural areas also, media use may be greater than averages would predict. We have already indicated the MacLean finding of greater farmer use of magazines than that of small city or village residents in Minnesota. Frey found that rural Turkey residents made greater use of newspapers than subscriptions would imply -- readership per copy was higher than in the city. This implies a greater use of media for information seeking by rural people, and it also hints at a more important social context for media use in rural areas.

These studies strongly illustrate the importance of the social setting or community in media use and preferences. They also go beyond the implication that individuals are interested only in the urbanizing aspects of mass media. They show that people have strong dispostion toward media and content that are physically and psychologically close, that relate to the sense of community and social organization, and that relate to daily living and work patterns. In other words, most people are localites, not cosmopolites, in mass media selection and use (14).

Characteristics of Individuals

What about the individual, what personal characteristics influence media use? Two obvious questions arise when we attempt to explain urban, sururban and rural communication

differences by looking at the characteristics of individuals. The first is to what extent those characteristics increase mass media availability for the individual. The second is whether the characteristics lead to greater overall media use and to selection of certain types of content from the various media.

In research in Poland, Duma (15) surveyed individuals in large towns, small towns and villages to determine the impact of urbanization on television use. Although he found that the degree of urbanization was associated with television use, class status of individuals was a better predictor of television set ownership. In large towns, 55% of the sets were owned by intelligentsia and 43% by laborers. In small towns, the respective percentages were 62% and 35%; in villages, 64% and 27%. Thus the more rural the residence, the greater was the proportion of television ownership by the intelligentsia, the less by laborers. In villages, when the majority of residents were farmers, only 5% of the sets were owned by farmers. Conversely, the more urban the location, the greater the proportion of television set ownership by the common man. Occupation-social class seems clearly a better predictor of media ownership than place of residence per se.

In a similar study, Carter and Supulveda (16) measured media habits of urban residents of Santiago, Chile. They found substantially higher use of magazines, newspapers, radio, books, television and movies by upper socio-economic status urban Chileans than by lower status residents.

Does this differential use according to occupation or social class mean a different impact on the individuals involved? Sweetser (17) found that the kinds of people influenced most during the first year of television set ownership were adults (rather than children), blue collar families, and residents of outer-metropolitan suburbs. These findings appear, at first glance, to be at odds with Duma's research. In Poland, intelligentsia had greater television set ownership, in the U.S., blue collar workers were most influenced by this medium. This apparent difference is probably explained by the Polish study measuring set ownership (intelligentsia can more likely afford a set), and the U.S. study reporting use (influence) of television given set ownership.*

Income and literacy (or education) are the personal characteristics most often found associated with media availability and use, and these are characteristics which are associated with urbanization. Fagen's study of media development in communist and non-communist countries found literacy and GNP were strong predictors of growth in radio. Farace and Donohew found that literacy and per capita income, out of 43 variables tested, were the best predictors of mass media communication levels. They found that urbanization was highly

* This illustrates a common problem for students of mass communication -- we must pay careful attention to the way terms are defined and measurements taken. Conflicting results often arise from differing measurements rather than from true differences in the situation under examination. Certainly mass communication literature does not evidence sufficient consistency in the use of terms such as mass media "availability" and "use". Availability is all too often equated with use.

correlated with literacy (.69) and per capita income (.67). Thus we find a mass media-urbanization-per capita income-literacy linkage.

How helpful are the results of studies which correlate characteristics such as income and education with media availability and use? Are such correlations useful in predicting how people will use and respond to mass media? Troldahl (18) has argued that social and demographic characteristics of individuals may not be very valuable in explaining media behavior. After reviewing many studies of consumption of mass media content, Troldahl concluded, "where sub-audiences are merely classified by social and demographic characteristics, not used as indicators of some more basic psychological or social process, the research has not gone far in its explanatory purpose". This seems to caution us to look beyond the correlations and ask <u>why</u> a certain personal characteristic should be associated with mass media use. Unless we can explain that characteristics' role in influencing communications behavior, we have a finding of dubious utility.

Kline (19) would perhaps agree that classifying media users according to demographic characteristics is not very useful in itself. Yet his analysis of interrelationships of personal variables and mass media behavior produced useful results. He examined various ecological and demographic variables in relation to time spent with media. Several variables measured relate to the prime concern of this paper: urban or suburban location

of individuals, prior residential move, where raised, etc. Only once in the analysis did one of these ecological factors appear important in explaining mass media use. Yet other variables were important. Education had a direct effect with use of only one medium, yet proved to exert important effects via other variables with which it is linked.

The Rural-Farm Exception

Our review thus far would lead us to state with some assurance that mass media use is associated with urbanization, mass media availability, and those personal characteristics related to modernization such as high social and occupational status, literacy and greater income.

Yet we also have reviewed evidence that media use varies among geographic areas partially because of the socially related functions of media and the utility of the information presented. Although we recognize that urbanization and mass media ubiquity are clearly associated with mass media use, perhaps we can add insight into our understanding of the communication patterns of individuals by looking solely at the geographic sector with the least amount of urbanization and media development -- the rural sector.

Since media are urbanizing phenomena, values reflected in media content are usually those of an urban, modernizing society. Since rural society is not perceived as modern, the explicit or implicit objective is to change the rural people toward greater modernity, i.e. urbanity.

In the so-called Western world, such modernization of rural areas is often referred to as agricultural or rural development. This rural development has been fostered by creation of specialized media to distribute technological information to farms.

In the United States, the primary historical stimulus for development of rural media and the farm press was the creation of specialized educational institutions to serve information needs of rural people. The 1862 Morrill Act which established the Land-Grant College system was followed in 1911 by the Smith Lever and Hughes acts which specifically established agricultural extension services for rural people. Although the resulting educational system was itself designed to transmit technology produced in these institutions to the farm decision-makers, it indirectly stimulated growth of a commercial media system. Farm magazines, radio and television farm programs, agricultural columns in daily and weekly newspapers, direct mail services -- all used the agricultural research and extension services of land-grant universities as primary sources of information. As agricultural business and industry grew, specialized print media proliferated. Now the United States has more than 300 general, regional and commodity farm publications, and thousands of agricultural industry, company or trade publications. Thus the rural media system itself is a prime example of urbanizing technology.

Currently, governments of many developing countries are

patterning their agricultural institutions and information systems after the U.S. model. In India and Brazil, for example, new agricultural universities and the extension information systems bear strong resemblance to U.S. institutions. As institutions develop and as technology spreads, we can expect to find communication patterns in developing nations which more and more approximate those we are familiar with in the U.S. However we should not conclude from this that communication patterns in rural areas of these countries will necessarily follow trends similar to those in rural U.S. This is because we are learning much about the process of communication that challenges our previous understanding. A number of myths are associated with previous interpretations of the findings of communication studies. Recent research is exposing these myths, and communication experts in developing countries are learning how to develop information systems based on the new reality.

The Literacy Myth

As an example, let us examine the "fact" that illiteracy is a barrier to communication via mass media. Research already reviewed in this paper shows rural people make less use of mass media (primarily because of less availability) and are less literate than urban residents. Correlation between rurality and illiteracy and low mass media use is evident in virtually every corner of the world. The logical assumption is thereby made that literacy is a major barrier to mass media use, especially

print media. Several studies have shown that this generalization can be inappropriate.

Fliegel (20) examined rural Brazilians' use of mass media. He found that literates and illiterates did not differ significantly in listening to agricultural information via radio. Although the illiterates had a lower total use of mass media, especially print media, they were extremely interested in the type of information most important in their livelihood -- farm information.

Brown (21) tested the distribution of a direct mail newsletter to peasant farmers in rural Chile. He gave these campesinos a before-after knowledge test on the subjects which the circular letters discussed. In examining knowledge gain, he found illiterates gained as much information from these printed media as did those who could read. Obviously family members or friends had read and verbally communicated the information to the illiterate farmers who received the newsletters. Such dependent literacy has been reported by others, including Deutschmann (22) and Rogers (23).

An appropriate conclusion from these and similar studies is that illiterates make less use of mass media primarily because such media are less available to them and because media do not carry content which interests them. Thus illiteracy is often not the major barrier, and literacy is just one of many contributing factors in the development process.

Support of this reasoning, and evidence of the unavailability

of agricultural content in media of developing areas, comes from many studies around the world. Similar conclusions have been stated by Whiting (24) regarding Afghanistan, Fett (25) concerning Brazil, Groot (26) about the Philippines, and Barghouti (27) relating to Jordan.

Such research tells us that we can alter the historical association of rurality-illiteracy-low mass media use by a completely non-behavioristic approach -- making mass media more available in rural areas and providing information that is locally relevant and useful.

Interpersonal Communication

This paper has emphasized differences among residents of rural, suburban and urban communites in their use of mass media. Interpersonal communication patterns have not been explored. Certainly, however, the social nature of the residential setting has much to say about interpersonal contacts and their importance in sub-societies. We know that interpersonal communication patterns do differ among these subcultural areas.

Wirth (28) has suggested that the personality development and life style of an urban inhabitant is rooted in his ecological location. Galpin (29) noted that the structure of rural communities has much to say about rural social organizations and the resulting communication patterns.

Basically, urbanization seems to substitute mass media and individual one-way communication for the more traditional diachronic interpersonal patterns associated with open rural

cultures. Suburbia provides a blending.

However, Chaffee (30) believes that neither mass communication nor interpersonal processes can be adequately understood without reference to one another. He points out that we are continually -- often simultaneously -- involved in both mass and interpersonal communication, as we build and cross-validate our interpretations of ourselves and the people and events that surround us.

Certainly lack of comparative data on interpersonal communication patterns prohibits a meaningful discussion of differences among rural, urban and suburban residents. Bostian (31) has noted that the type of information involved in mass media-interpersonal linkages has been shown vitally important in making generalizations about such communication. Yet he knows of no studies which have held type of information constant at a given time and compared interpersonal communication in the three subcultures of concern to us here.

Some Research Needs

One of the difficulties facing us in our attempt to trace mass media-urbanization linkages is that few historians have been interested in recording mass media growth within countries in a manner that permits us to make conclusions about the spread of media in urban, suburban and rural areas. Our assumptions about mass media-urbanization linkages are thus weakened due to lack of systematic continuous measurement.

We need evidence of media growth over time to understand how urbanization relates to media development. And there are many related questions for which we need better answers -- what size of community is needed for local media development; what is the effect of transportation on media distribution, and so on?

It would also be helpful to have repetition of the MacLean study to compare urban, suburban and rural residents within a geographical area. This would help us separate out the effects of modernization. We should also attempt studies which look at communication patterns within these three subcultures where mass media availability is similar. If we separate out the effects of modernization and mass media availability, we can better determine the influence of place of residence.

In this paper we have characterized two distinctly different types of suburbs and indicated that communication behavior of suburban residents of both types differs substantially. Yet we have little actual evidence of suburban media habits. Current U.S. emphasis on mass media use by minority groups, especially ghetto residents, is helping us understand urban communication patterns. We need equal attention to delineate communication patterns of affluent suburbanites in the U.S. and of poverty suburbanites in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Few studies have considered content of information transmitted by mass media as a variable important in explaining urban-rural differences. Yet we have pointed out how clearly farm

residents differ from urban residents in content choices. How do individuals in rural, urban and suburban communities differ in their preferences for various types of information and for sources of information? Is physical and psychological closeness of information equal among residents of these areas? How do content preferences relate to an individual's sense of community? We may conjecture that content is often ignored in communication studies because its tremendous variability produces differing results which confound the researcher's understanding of the communication process he is investigating. Yet it is for this very reason that content must be examined more closely.

We know much about how personal characteristics of individuals relate to their use of mass media, but we have not determined whether these factors are relatively more influential for rural, suburban or urban residents, or with a given level of mass media availability. Is illiteracy a greater barrier to reception and use of information via mass media in urban or rural areas? In what setting is the amount of income an individual has more determinate?

Finally, we need more comparative studies of interpersonal-mass media linkages among residents of these three community types. We are often willing to make generalizations regarding such things as the lack of neighbor-to-neighbor communication in urban areas, and the homophily (like talks to like) of ghetto resident communication patterns, with little research on which to base our statements.

Whatever the results of additional studies, we can be certain that geographic residence will be only one of many variables influential in the process of communication.

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